

King County Rural Forest Program

1998 Monitoring Report

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This report is the third annual monitoring report for the forested area of King County. It is a follow-up to the *Forest Monitoring Baseline Report* published in April, 1998 which describes the monitoring program and presents the baseline conditions as of the end of 1996.

The format for this third annual report is similar to that of the 1997 annual report, but the information included has been expanded in certain sections in order to describe the situation throughout the entire county. The report includes the following sections:

Forest Incentive Program Participation:

- Technical Assistance
- Education
- Current Use Taxation

Permit Activity:

- Land Use permits in the Rural Forest District that have had any activity in 1998.
- 1998 Forest Practice Applications throughout King County.

Data

Information for this report was obtained from a variety of sources. Technical assistance data is maintained by King County foresters in an Access database. Data for the Current Use Taxation program is maintained by the King County Assessors office. In addition, the PBRs/Timberlands program in Resource Lands and Open Space maintains their own database for those categories. Both data sources were used in the compilation of this report.

Land-use permit information is maintained by the King County Department of Development and Environmental Services (DDES) in the Sierra permit tracking database. In addition, individual permit files are kept on file at DDES, and many of these were reviewed in the compilation of this report. DDES also maintains data on Forest Practice Applications.

Where possible, the data from 1998 has been compared to that of 1996 and 1997 as a first step in showing any significant trends that may be developing. However, because past reports focused on the Rural Forest District (RFD) and the Lower Cedar River Basin (a separate report in 1998), information for many of the areas evaluated in this report is not available for past years. This explains many of the blanks in the following tables.

Finally, although every effort was made to obtain up-to-date information, the accuracy of this report is limited by the quality of the King County Geographic Information System (GIS) data available. Much of the GIS parcel coverage is not current, and therefore the mapped information and the acreage totals contain some inaccuracies. However, the report does provide a good overview of the status of forestland and forestry throughout the county.

Technical Assistance

The King County technical assistance foresters completed their first full year of employment in 1998. Their role is to assist landowners with forest management plans, promote the incentive programs, teach classes, and respond to a variety of landowner questions and needs. The 1998 efforts of the technical assistance foresters are summarized in Table 1 with a comparison to the 1997 efforts. As can be seen in the totals for both “Plans completed” and “On site visits”, the number of assistance efforts more than doubled over 1997. While this is partly due to the fact that the foresters were not on staff for the entire year in 1997, it can also be attributed to the program’s successful outreach efforts and greater awareness among landowners.

Several other conclusions can be drawn from Table 1. A comparison of the parcel and acreage columns for plans completed suggests that the program serves primarily small landowners, as the average parcel size is 9.7 acres. Larger landowners with an interest in forest management are presumably hiring forestry consultants or managing their lands without outside assistance.

Finally, the data also show that the foresters have been as active outside the Rural Forest District as within it. While this may be due in part to the fact that much of the land within the RFD is in large holdings, it also suggests that the foresters’ assistance is in demand throughout the Rural Area and emphasizes the continued need to work toward preserving forests and forestry both within and outside the RFD.

DDES also retained a forester in 1998 to provide forestry education and increased enforcement of clearing violations in the Cedar River, Issaquah, and East Lake Sammamish basins. In 1998, he assisted numerous property owners with information about the permit system and forest management, and with evaluations of hazard trees. His efforts are not included in Table 1, as data were not available for 1997 or 1998.

Education

The education component of the forestry program continues to be an interdepartmental effort with the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, Washington State University Cooperative Extension-King County, DDES and KCDNR all participating. The Forest Advisor series provides intensive training on forestry topics and requires that the course graduates volunteer their time in forestry education or other forestry projects. The Forest Stewardship Planning series coaches landowners through the process of developing their own forest management plans.

The county offered 3 Forest Stewardship Planning classes in 1998. Two of them took place on Vashon Island and one in Issaquah. One Forest Advisor Class was offered in Maple Valley. Table 2 includes a summary of participation in the Forest Stewardship Planning and Forest Advisor classes.

Map 1 shows the geographic distribution of the technical assistance efforts and suggests that for the most part assistance has been evenly distributed throughout the Rural Area. The exception to this has been particular success on Vashon Island as discussed later in this report.

Table 1: Technical Assistance Data (Blanks spaces in the table indicate that the data were not reported in 1997.)

	1997			1998		
	People	Parcels	Acres	People	Parcels	Acres
On site visits						
Rural Forest District	2		NA	11	22	NA
Rural Area (outside the RFD and Vashon)			NA	36	50	NA
Forest Production District			NA	2	2	NA
Vashon Island			NA	22	30	NA
Urban Area			NA	14	20	NA
Total	23*		NA	88**	132**	NA
Plans completed						
Rural Forest District		2	20	3	3	78
Rural Area (outside the RFD and Vashon)				9	12	87
Forest Production District				1	1	20
Vashon Island				20	29	247
Urban Area				0	0	0
Total	15*	20*	215*	34**	47**	457**
Phone Contacts						
Total			NA	70	NA	NA

* This is the total for the entire county. Information for the various areas within the county was not reported in 1997.

** These totals exceed the sum of the various areas due to the fact that some of the records do not match parcels in the GIS data.

Table 2: Education Program Data (Blanks spaces in the table indicate that the data were not reported in 1997.)

	1997		1998	
Coached Planning Class	Students	Parcels	Students	Parcels
Rural Forest District			3	3
Rural Area (outside the RFD and Vashon)			6	10
Forest Production District			0	0
Vashon Island			25	37
Urban Area			0	0
Total	28*		36**	55**
Forest Advisor Class				
Rural Forest District			0	0
Rural Area (outside the RFD and Vashon)			5	7
Forest Production District			0	0
Vashon Island			2	2
Urban Area			6	6
Total	17*		17**	20**

* This is the total for the entire county. Information for the various areas within the county was not reported in 1997.

** These totals exceed the sum of the various areas due the fact that some of the records do not match parcels in the GIS data. Furthermore, some of the people participating in classes do not own forestland.

Current Use Taxation

There are three categories of current use taxation programs related to forestlands: Forestland (RCW84.33), Timberland (RCW84.34) and the forest stewardship land category of the Public Benefit Rating System (PBRS) (RCW84.34). The Forestland Program is available to landowners with at least 20 acres of land devoted to forestry. The Timberland Program is available to landowners with between 5 and 20 acres of forestland and requires a forest management plan. Typically, a property in the Timberlands Program has some acreage reserved for a home site or agricultural area, and the remaining acreage is managed for forestry and enrolled in the program. The acreage figure available for this annual report is the total acreage of each property in the program. The acreage managed as forest and enjoying the tax reduction is usually somewhat smaller. The forestry category of the PBRS program is available to landowners with at least four acres of forestland and requires a forest stewardship plan.

Table 3 shows a breakdown of the 1997 and 1998 applications to the CUT program by program type. A comparison between the two years shows a decrease in the number of applications to both Timber and PBRS, though the number of acres applied for in 1998 in the Timberlands Program increased. In the Rural Forest District, there was a substantial decrease in the acreage covered by Forestland applications – from 780 to 252 acres. Map 2 shows the geographic distribution of the applications and suggests that the Timberland program has been most successful in the northern part of the county and on Vashon Island.

Table 4 shows properties removed from Current Use Taxation in 1998. One hundred forty-nine parcels totaling 25,468 acres were removed from the Forestland program, but 90 of these parcels totaling 24,851 acres were transferred to public ownership through land exchanges, mostly within the Forest Production District. Twelve parcels totaling 106 acres were subsequently enrolled in the Timberlands program. Only 3 parcels totaling 44 acres were removed from Open Space or PBRS, and none were removed from the Timberlands category.

Table 5 shows the totals enrolled in the Current Use Program as of the end of 1998. In the Rural Forest District, the total number of acres enrolled in any form of Current Use program is 18,515, which is roughly 49% of all the privately owned land in the district. In the Forest Production District, roughly 96% of the private land is enrolled. On Vashon, approximately 21% of all the forested privately owned parcels greater than four acres in size are enrolled. Map 3 shows the geographic distribution of enrolled properties.

Table 3: 1997 and 1998 Current Use Taxation Applications (Blank spaces in the table indicate that the data were not calculated in 1997.)

Public Benefit Rating System (all categories*)						
	1997			1998		
	People	Parcels	Acres	People	Parcels	Acres
Rural Forest District	15			1	1	5
Rural Area (outside the RFD and Vashon)				36	43	178
Forest Production District				0	0	0
Vashon Island				5	6	30
Urban Area				4	4	34
Total	66**			46	54	247
Timberlands Program						
	1997			1998		
	People	Parcels	Acres	People	Parcels	Acres
Rural Forest District	13		200	5	8	115
Rural Area (outside the RFD and Vashon)				7	10	98
Forest Production District				4	9	101
Vashon Island				13	20	179
Urban Area				0	0	0
Unknown location				1	13	145
Total	51**		550**	28***	60	638
Forestland Program						
	1997			1998		
	People	Parcels	Acres	People	Parcels	Acres
Rural Forest District			780	9	13	252
Rural Area (outside the RFD and Vashon)				1	1	22
Forest Production District				2	15	5875
Vashon Island				2	5	120
Urban Area				0	0	0
Unknown location				1	1	1
Total				14***	35	6270
Total of all 3 Programs						
	1997			1998		
	People	Parcels	Acres	People	Parcels	Acres
Rural Forest District				15	22	372
Rural Area (outside the RFD and Vashon)				44	54	298
Forest Production District				6	24	5976
Vashon Island				20	31	329
Urban Area				4	4	34
Unknown location				2	14	146
Total				91	149	7155

*Twelve of the PBRS applications totaling forty-nine acres used the forestry category.

**This is the total for the entire county. Information for the various areas within the county was not reported in 1997.

***These numbers are less than the sum of the different areas because several landowners own parcels in more than one area.

Table 4: 1998 Current Use Taxation Program Removals.

	From Forestland		From Open Space / PBRs	
	Parcels	Acres	Parcels	Acres
Rural Forest District	18	184	0	0
Forest Production District	91	24,769*	0	0
Vashon Island	1	19	1	3.5
Other	12	174	1	26
Unknown location	27	322	1	14.5
Total	149	25,468*	3	44

*Throughout the county 24,851 acres were transferred to public ownership.

Table 5: Properties enrolled in the Current Use Taxation Program as of 1998

Public Benefit Rating System		
	Parcels	Acres
Rural Forest District	75	1809
Rural Area (outside the RFD and Vashon)	306	3139
Forest Production District	4	1146
Vashon Island	80	720.5
Urban Area	228	3706
Unknown location	39	1375
Total	732	11,895.5
Timberlands Program		
	Parcels	Acres
Rural Forest District	44	659
Rural Area (outside the RFD and Vashon)	75	764
Forest Production District	18	325
Vashon Island	77	635
Urban Area	2	25
Unknown location	6	46
Total	222	2454
Forestland Program		
	Parcels	Acres
Rural Forest District	458	16,047
Rural Area (outside the RFD and Vashon)	217	4060
Forest Production District	1015	254,015
Vashon Island	23	506
Urban Area	80	2543
Total	1793	277,171
Total of all 3 Programs		
	Parcels	Acres
Rural Forest District	577	18,515
Rural Area (outside the RFD and Vashon)	598	7963
Forest Production District	1037	255,486
Vashon Island	180	1861.5
Urban Area	310	6274
Unknown location	45	1421
Total	2747	291,520.5

Note: 7 of the properties included in the PBRs data are also enrolled in the Timberlands program. They total 125 acres. One is on Vashon, 5 are in the Rural Area outside the RFD, and one is of unknown location.

Land-Use Permit Activity

Land-use permit data were analyzed to interpret the impact of individual permits and the combined impact of different permit types on the entire Rural Forest District. The time consuming nature of this effort necessitated that only permits within the Rural Forest District were analyzed. Five types of permits were deemed to indicate forestland conversion because they can result in the recognition of additional building lots which involve the clearing of forestland: plats, short plats, separate lot reviews, subdivision exemptions and lot line adjustments. Plats and short plats require that the applicant go through the subdivision process whereas separate lot reviews, subdivision exemptions and lot line adjustments are exempt from the subdivision code and do not involve an environmental review. The data are differentiated between permits approved in 1997 and 1998 (Table 6) and new applications in 1998 (Table 7).

Plats

Two plats in the Rural Forest District had hearings in 1998: Mystery Meadows and Plateau 40, both southeast of Maple Valley. Mystery Meadows will create 7 lots and Plateau 40 will create 8 lots. Applications for these plats were received in 1996 and 1997 respectively.

DDES received 4 applications for plats in the RFD in 1998; Maple Ridge Highlands (575 proposed lots), the Chateaus at Greenbrier (14 lots), the Ridge at Lake Sawyer (60 lots) and the Uplands Reserve (41 lots). Maple Ridge Highlands is part of the Polygon 4 to 1 project, and the lots are now within the Urban Growth Area, although the development did have an impact on the RFD. The Uplands Reserve was removed from the Forest Production District as part of a demonstration project to assess the feasibility of combining development with a working forest. A summary of the total impact on the Rural Forest District is included in Table 7.

Short Plats

Two short-plat applications had hearings in 1998, each proposing 4 lots on a 20 acre parcel. Five short-plat applications were submitted involving the creation of 20 lots from an original 5 adjacent lots on 120 acres just north of the Green River.

Separate Lot Reviews

Separate Lot Reviews recognize the legal establishment of existing and pre-existing lots of record. These include newly recognized lots being divided by public road right of ways, designated shorelines and other unrecorded plats as described in King County Code (KCC) 19.04.420 A, B, & C. The separate lot review process was used extensively in 1998 in the Rural Forest District as a way of recognizing buildable lots.

Subdivision Exemptions

Subdivision exemptions include large lot segregations (division of land into lots that are 20 acres or larger), testamentary provision, and transfer of land to a public body. The majority of the 1998 subdivision exemption permits in the RFD are large lot segregations.

Table 6: Rural Forest District land-use permits approved in 1997 and 1998 (Blanks spaces in the chart indicate that the data were not reported in 1997.)

Type of permit	1997				1998			
	# of permits	# of original lots	# of lots recognized	# of acres affected	# of permits	# of original lots	# of lots recognized	# of acres affected
Plats	3		66	595	2	2	15	72
Short plats	5		15	91	2	2	8	40
Separate Lot Reviews	26		51	833	11	29	77	663
Subdivision Exemptions	2		9	139	5	8	27	554
Total	36		141	1658	20	41	127	1329

Table 7: Rural Forest District land-use permits applied for in 1998

Type of Application	# of applications	# of original lots	# of lots recognized	# of acres affected
Plats	4	72	690*	701*
Short plats	5	5	20	120
Separate Lot Reviews	7	13	21	587
Subdivision Exemptions	3	4	8	171
Total	15	94	739*	1579*

*These numbers include the 575 urban lots in the Polygon 4 to 1 project.

Lot Line Adjustments (LLAs)

Lot line adjustments do not recognize additional lots; however, they can result in new building sites by reconfiguring previously unbuildable parcels. The majority of the LLA permits in 1998 were reconfigurations of lots to provide road access prior to building. However, eight of the LLA permits involved the extensive reconfiguring of lot lines that effectively resulted in additional building lots. This use of the lot line adjustment process has been stopped by a recent Executive emergency order.

Combined Impact of Land-Use Permits

A summary of the land-use permits approved in 1997 and 1998 shows a total of 2987 acres potentially affected in the RFD over the last two years. In addition, permits applied for in 1998 potentially impact 1579 acres. The total amounts to 4566 acres, or 10% of the Rural Forest District affected by the subdivision process. Map 4 shows the geographic distribution of the development permits.

A comparison of the different permit types suggests that the “miscellaneous” type permits (separate lot reviews, subdivision exemptions and lot line adjustments) are being used more frequently than formal plats and short plats as a way of recognizing additional lots. The recent emergency orders passed by the Executive are temporarily addressing this problem by further defining the historical provisions for a separate lot and preventing the large scale movement of lot lines that has resulted in large developments.

Finally, although this report does not include an in-depth analysis of building permits, it is notable that there were 952 permits issued in 1997 and 867 in 1998 in the Rural Area.

These numbers far exceed the projections of the 1994 Comprehensive plan, which called for 350 permits per year. A more thorough analysis of the number and geographic distribution of building permits may be warranted.

Forest Practice Applications

Washington State Forest Practice Applications (FPAs) are a measure of forestry activity throughout the county. Class 2, 3, and 4S permits require replanting and indicate continued forest use while Class 4G permits indicate conversions to a nonforest use. When a landowner in King County harvests under a Class 2, 3 or 4S permit, the county places a moratorium on the property that restricts development for six years. Table 8 shows Forest Practice Applications for 1996-1998 throughout the county. Map 4 shows the geographic distribution of the Class 4G applications. Map 5 shows the Class 2, 3, and 4S applications.

In 1998, there were twice as many Class 2, 3, and 4S FPAs filed for parcels in the Rural Area outside the Rural Forest District (35 applications covering 618 acres) as within it (16 applications covering 473 acres). Furthermore, there were almost as many acres harvested in the Urban Area, where 400 acres were harvested on 6 permits. However, whether or not these harvests were truly non-conversion harvests remains to be seen. In 1998, there were 174 moratoriums on 83 different parcels lifted prior to the 6-year deadline. This suggests that landowners are applying for non-conversion permits when in reality they intend to apply for moratorium relief and convert their land.

With regard to Class 4G conversion permits, there were 17 applications (1288 acres) in the Urban Area, 4 applications in the RFD (9 acres) and 11 applications in the rest of the Rural Area (176 acres).

Table 8: Forest Practice Applications (Blanks spaces in the table indicate that the data were not reported in 1996 and 1997.)

Class 2,3,4S Harvests						
	Applications			Acres		
	1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
Rural Forest District	26	29	16	662	761	473
Rural Area (outside the RFD)			35			618
Forest Production District	134	207	150	12,915	8892	7799
Vashon Island			7			50
Urban Area			6			400
Total			214			9340
Class 4G Harvests						
	Applications			Acres		
	1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
Rural Forest District	3	0	4	16	0	9
Rural Area (outside the RFD)			11			176
Forest Production District	1	2	2	4	58	23
Vashon Island			1			1
Urban Area			17			1283
Total			35			1492

High/Lowlights

Vashon Island

The King County forestry program has been extremely successful on Vashon Island, where over half of the plans and one quarter of the on-site visits have taken place. Since 1994, the island has hosted six Forest Stewardship courses presented by WADNR or the county. There are over 100 landowners and close to 2000 acres enrolled in Current Use Taxation programs. These successes are due in large part to the efforts of the Vashon Maury Island Land Trust, which has taken a lead role in promoting forest stewardship among private landowners and encouraging participation in county forestry programs. A number of landowners who have taken the Stewardship course have subsequently donated permanent conservation easements to the land-trust, including one for an 80 acre forested parcel. In recognition of these efforts, the county recently gave the Green Globe Award for Leader in Resource Management to David Warren, the executive director of the land trust. The King County forestry program will continue to work with Vashon and hopes to replicate the successes there in other parts of the county.

Black Diamond Area

As can be seen on Map 4, which shows the distribution of 1998 land-use permit activity, the Rural Forest District surrounding Black Diamond is under a great deal of development pressure. There are a large number of separate lot reviews, subdivision exemptions and lot line adjustments pending in the area, which suggests that landowners are attempting to recognize parcels with the intention of developing.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The expansion of the technical assistance program in 1998 and the steady increase in the number of requests for assistance suggest that this program has been quite successful with small landowners. As larger parcels are fragmented into smaller (20-acre) homesites, the importance of the technical assistance program will increase. Given this reality, the county needs to consider the best way to expand this program with the goal of reaching a large number of new landowners. Promoting cooperative management efforts may be a feasible approach.

The Current Use Taxation program continues to have a positive impact in temporarily preserving both small and large parcels. The steady increase in enrollment is encouraging. However, the fact that only 49% of the private land in the Rural Forest District is enrolled suggests that many landowners are either not aware of the program or are choosing not to participate. Increased outreach efforts may help in this area. In addition, the county may want to consider surveying those landowners who are not participating in an effort to better understand their reasons for forgoing the incentive program.

The most significant issue that the county is facing is the segregation of large parcels through the separate lot review and subdivision exemption processes. The recent executive emergency order has put a temporary stop to the widespread use of the separate

lot review process, but legislation is needed to avoid the recognition of buildable lots through this process in the future. More importantly, the county needs to come up with incentives that enable forest landowners to realize the residential value of their land without converting it away from forest. The Transfer of Development Credit program is a step in the right direction, but it remains to be seen whether this program will effectively address the issue. In addition, the Rural Forest Commission is working to come up with other feasible incentive programs and will put forth a proposal in the near future. Ultimately, the permanent protection of forestlands may involve the purchase of lands outright or the purchase of development rights. Clearly, a funding source for such an effort would be needed.

With regard to forest practices, the number of Class 2, 3, and 4S applications outside the Forest Production District number 64 and affect a total 1541 acres. These numbers may suggest two trends; 1) that forestry is still to some extent a viable industry in the Rural Area and even parts of the Urban Area or 2) that landowners are applying for non-conversion permits with the intention of ultimately converting their land. The large number of moratoriums that were lifted in 1998 suggests that this may be the case. The County needs to monitor closely the future land-use on these parcels and be more stringent in granting relief from moratoriums.